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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the progress made by the Commission on Higher Education and the faculty and administrators at New Mexico's 25 postsecondary campuses in facilitating student transfer between institutions. New Mexico's colleges and universities have steadily improved their working relationships, which is based on an increased rate of transfer credits. The state's six public universities have been found to accept 95% of the credits presented for transfer. Reasons for transferring and being denied transfer are described. An analysis was performed on data from the Commission's statewide database to gather information about the representation of transfer students among bachelor's degree recipients. The study found that over half of New Mexico's bachelor's degrees are awarded to transfer students. In addition, most baccalaureate students enroll for more than the minimum number of credits needed for the completion of a degree. Statewide, transfer students differ little, if at all, from native students in this respect. Among associate degree recipients, it was found that over four in ten of New Mexico's associate degrees are awarded to transfer students. Commission Priorities for 1999-2000 are also detailed. Tables describe credit hour accumulation by associate degree recipients and the total hours in New Mexico by campus. (JJL)

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# Student Transfer Between New Mexico's Postsecondary Institutions Spring 1999

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# New Mexico Commission on Higher Education

# Student Transfer Between New Mexico's Postsecondary Institutions

**Spring 1999**

During 1998 the Commission on Higher Education and faculty and administration at the state's 25 postsecondary campuses continued to work together to smooth the pathway for students transferring from one campus to another. This is a brief report of that progress and a summary of the materials developed to assist students in preparing for transfer.

Nationwide research reveals that the majority of students enrolling for higher education now assemble coursework from two or three campuses by the time they complete their degree programs[1]. In New Mexico, for example, over half of the students receiving bachelor's degrees in 1997-98 had transferred from another institution - either in-state or out-of-state - before completing their degree. Other students enroll from the outset at the institution where they intend to complete a degree, but also take selected courses elsewhere with the intention of transferring those courses toward their degree. In addition, students often interrupt their enrollment to work or take care of other obligations or they alter their aspirations and shift campuses to pursue new degree plans. Given the complex patterns of student enrollment that are now seen in New Mexico and elsewhere, it is vital that students, faculty, and administrators all continue to play their parts in assuring appropriate transfer of credit between campuses and contribution of those credits toward degree requirements.

**Transfer in New Mexico: Institutions Operating as a System**

Since the late 1980s, New Mexico's colleges and universities have steadily improved their working relationships, which is reflected in an increased rate of acceptance of transfer credits. In 1989-90, for example, fewer than 70% of the credits presented for evaluation were accepted in transfer. In recent years, the acceptance rate has reached over 87%, statewide. The state's six public *universities* now accept 95% of the credits presented for transfer.

**Acceptance of Transfer Credits by New Mexico's Public Universities**

Of the 5% of credits denied transfer:

- 37% were from vocational or other courses unrelated to the transfer program
- 31% were from developmental or remedial courses, not at a college level
- 25% were from courses that had been repeated to raise a grade
- 6% were from courses in which the student had earned a grade of D or less

Some students transfer between community colleges or from a university to a community college. In some cases, these students have changed their educational goals and have decided to seek a vocational certificate or associate's degree. Others are taking courses preparatory for yet another transfer elsewhere. New Mexico's nineteen *associate degree institutions* as a group accepted 77% of the credits presented to them for evaluation. Of the credits which could not be accepted, over 67% were junior- and senior-level or other courses unrelated to the students' new goals, and over 32% were courses repeated to raise a grade, pre-college (remedial or developmental) courses, or courses in which the student had earned a grade of D or less.

**Transfer Students Among Degree Recipients:**

**Prevalence and Accumulation of Enrolled Hours in Comparison to Non-Transfer Students**

Last year for the first time, an analysis was performed on data from the Commission's statewide data base to gather information about the representation of transfer students among bachelor's degree recipients. This year the analysis was extended to include associate degree recipients. The general strategy was to classify each graduate in a given group of degree recipients as either a transfer student at some point in his/her education or as a non-transfer (often denoted as a "native" student, that is, one whose postsecondary education was begun at the institution where the degree was granted) and then to count the number of credit hours attempted by each student at the time of completing the degree[2].Two key observations result from this analysis relating to the rising level of transfer and the accumulation of "excess" enrolled hours.

*Bachelor's Degree Recipients*

*Over half of New Mexico's bachelor's degrees are awarded to transfer students.* In 1997-98, 5,751 students received bachelor's degrees from New Mexico's six universities. Of this number, 4,807 could be classified clearly as either transfers or non-transfers. Of these students, 52% (2,477) had transferred into the university where they ultimately received their degree. Of the transfers, slightly fewer than half (1,143or 46%) had transferred from another New Mexico institution and slightly more than half (1,334 or 54%) had transferred from out of state. This analysis confirms that student transfer is now a major phenomenon in baccalaureate higher education and that New Mexico institutions receive a substantial number of transfer students from other states.

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*Most baccalaureate students enroll for more than the minimum number of credit hours needed for completion of a degree. Statewide, transfer students differ little if at all from native students in this respect.* A minimum of 128 credit hours is required for award of a bachelor's degree at most of New Mexico universities (New Mexico Tech requires a minimum of 130). Among those students who completed their degree at the institution they had originally entered ("native students"), the average number of credits attempted at the time of graduation was 156. Among transfers from other New Mexico institutions, the average number of credit attempted was 162. For the six universities, individually, the averages for cumulative enrolled hours are shown in the left half of the following table.

| University | Enrolled Credit Hours Accumulated by Native Students | | Enrolled Credit Hours Accumulated by Transfer Students | | Percent of Students Exceeding 135 Enrolled Credit Hours at Graduation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Native Students | | Transfer Students | |
| | 95-96 | 97-98 | 95-96 | 97-98 | 95-96 | 97-98 | 95-96 | 97-98 |
| UNM | 157 | 158 | 144 | 148 | 80% | 80% | 58% | 66% |
| NMSU | 150 | 155 | 157 | 165 | 69% | 83% | 75% | 84% |
| NM Tech | 136 | 153 | 145 | 191 | 39% | 80% | 50% | 83% |
| ENMU | 152 | 154 | 145 | 145 | 77% | 79% | 66% | 60% |
| NMHU | 163 | 159 | 149 | 159 | 91% | 85% | 68% | 74% |
| WNMU | 150 | 154 | 156 | 161 | 66% | 82% | 81% | 72% |
| Unweighted Averages | 151 | 156 | 149 | 162 | 70% | 81% | 63% | 69% |
| Median | 151 | 155 | 147 | 160 | 73% | 81% | 67% | 73% |

Using 135 credit hours as a cut-off for identifying students who had accumulated "excess" credits prior to baccalaureate graduation, about 81% of the native students, statewide, exceeded this level in comparison to 69% of the in-state transfer students, shown in the right half of the above table. For native students this excess credit amounts to 5-7 additional courses taken by a typical student and for a transfer student, it amounts to 7-9 additional courses. Even though some programs require more than the institution's minimum credit requirement for graduation by three or four courses, the data indicate a trend toward greater credit hour accumulation whether the student has transferred from another New Mexico institution or has completed the bachelor's degree at the institution of original enrollment[3].

*Associate Degree Recipients*

*Over four in ten of New Mexico's associate degrees are awarded to transfer students.* In 1997-98, 2,958 students received associate's degrees from New Mexico's colleges and universities. Of this number, 2,032 could be classified clearly as either transfers or non-transfers. Of these students, 42% (854) had transferred into the institution where they ultimately received their degree. Of these transfers 43% had transferred from another New Mexico institution and 57% had transferred from out of state. This analysis confirms that transfer is a major phenomenon in associate degree higher education and that New Mexico institutions receive a substantial number of transfer students from other states.

*Most associate degree students accumulate more than the minimum number of credit hours needed for completion of their degree.* Statewide, transfer students accumulate an average of 3-4


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more courses than native students (Appendix A). Credit hour requirements for completion of an associate's degree vary widely statewide from a low of 60 hours to a high of 89 hours, but average approximately 68 credit hours (Appendix B). Among those students who completed their associate degree at the institution they originally entered ("native students"), the average number of credits accumulated at the time of graduation was 101. Among transfers from other New Mexico institutions, the average number of credits accumulated was 113.

**Commission Priorities 1999-2000**

During the coming academic year, the Commission will continue its work with institution faculty and administrators to develop additional two-year transfer modules in particular areas of study. Six new modules are now under development, including Early Childhood Education, Social & Behavioral Sciences, Physical Sciences, Computer Science, Computer & Management Information Systems, and Arts & Humanities.

Another priority of the Commission is to improve statewide public information on articulation and transfer in at least three ways. First, the General Education Common Core and all current two-year transfer modules will be available to institutional personnel and the public via the CHE website (www.nmche.org). Second, all public New Mexico colleges have been asked to include information in their institutional catalogs about the use of transfer modules and where copies of modules may be obtained.

Finally, the Commission has been working with New Mexico colleges and universities since January, 1999 to improve the methodology used to evaluate the nature and effectiveness of student transfer in New Mexico with the goal of more meaningful and inclusive future reports. The methodology in this report is identical to that used for the first time in the 1997 Transfer Report released Spring of 1998, with the addition of analyses for associate degree recipients. A revised report in December 1999 will include a description of the phenomenon of student movement in NM and for the first time, will include those who transfer from a branch campus of that institution's main campus in the transfer analysis.

Students seeking admission to bachelor's degree programs after beginning their study at a community college or another university no longer need be frustrated by earlier provincial thinking about the content of programs or the qualifications of faculty. Students do have to select their courses wisely and perform well in order to assure their success after transfer. Students who know the institution from which they wish to graduate should contact advisors at their "target" institution regularly to stay informed of current graduation requirements.

**Sound Advisement of Students and Careful Selection of Courses are Critical!**
Several guides are now available to help current and future students choose courses that will be appropriate for their educational goals and that will be guaranteed to transfer between campuses. New Mexico's postsecondary institutions have made great progress over the past decade in acceptance of credits. The critical factors in achieving smooth transfer between institutions are now (1) a student's judicious selection of courses early in his or her enrollment and (2) the availability of good advice from campus personnel that will assist the student in making wise


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choices. An array of advisory materials are available to assist students in making sound choices as they enroll for courses.

- **New Mexico's Common Core of Lower-Division General Education**

  This list of 35-credit-hours of general education courses is the safest choice for students who have not yet selected a major field of study for their degree. The common core is the base around which most degree programs are built, and the courses in the core are guaranteed to transfer between all New Mexico campuses and to apply toward the graduation requirements for most degree programs. The common core is published in most institutions' catalogs and can also be obtained from campus advisors or from the Commission on Higher Education and its web site (www.nmche.org).

- **Transfer Modules for Students Who Have Identified an Academic Major**

  Lists of recommended courses equivalent to two years of full-time study have been prepared for students who have selected a major but may not have selected the university where they wish to complete the major. These lists - called transfer modules - are available for students majoring in engineering, business, teacher education, and biological sciences, and are under development for majors in physical sciences, social/behavioral sciences, humanities/fine arts, computer science, computer/management information systems, and early childhood education. Students who follow the course recommendations in these modules will benefit from a sound program of study and will be able to move between campuses without loss of credit. Copies of current transfer modules can be obtained from campus advisors or from the Commission on Higher Education and its web site (www.nmche.org).

- **Transfer Agreements for Students Who Have Identified Both a Major and A Next Institution**

  Students who decide early upon both a major and a transfer university may be able to follow specific, four-year plans of study agreed upon between a particular community college and a particular university. Information about these agreements can be obtained from campus advisors.

New Mexico's public community colleges and universities have demonstrated their interest in assisting students wishing to move from one campus to another in order to achieve their educational goals. Comparison of credits accumulated by transfer students and non-transfer students at the time they complete a bachelor's degree suggests that transfer credit is being appropriately recognized, at least for most students. The state's postsecondary institutions also have demonstrated their willingness to continue the project of developing advisory tools designed to help students to achieve meaningful higher education in efficient ways across New Mexico.

Appendix A

**Credit Hour Accumulation by Associate Degree Recipients**

| Institution | Credit Hours Accumulated by Native Students | Credit Hours Accumulated by Transfer Students | Associate Degree Credit Hours Required |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 97-98 | 97-98 | |
| UNM-Main | 129 | 134 | |
| UNM-Gallup | 101 | 114 | 60-76 |
| UNM-Los Alamos | 111 | 117 | 63-67 |
| UNM-Valencia | 93 | 100 | 60-69 |
| UNM-Taos | 92 | 120 | |
| NMSU-Main | 122 | 94 | |
| NMSU-Alamogordo | 96 | 115 | 66-72 |
| NMSU-Carlsbad | 94 | 111 | 66-70 |
| NMSU-Grants | 97 | 89 | 65-68 |
| NMSU-Doña Ana | 99 | 109 | 66-82 |
| NMHU-Main | 124 | | |
| WNMU | 111 | 130 | |
| ENMU-Main | 115 | 118 | |
| ENMU-Roswell | 107 | 119 | 64-74 |
| ENMU-Ruidoso | 83 | 74 | 64-69 |
| NMIMT | 82 | | |
| San Juan College | 100 | 95 | 61-68 |
| Santa Fe CC | 99 | 122 | 63-74 |
| Clovis CC | 88 | 111 | 65-77 |
| NM Junior College | 91 | | 64-70 |
| NNMCC-El Rito | 101 | | 61-89 |
| NNMCC-Española | 106 | 116 | |
| Albq. T-VI | 109 | 137 | 61-86 |
| Mesa Tech. College | 77 | | 65-75 |
| | | | |
| **Average** | **101** | **113** | 68 |

Appendix B

**Associate Degree Total Hours in New Mexico**

| Campus | | AAS | AS | AA | AFA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| Mesa Tech. College | range | 65-75 | | | |
| Luna Vo-Tech. Inst. | range | 63-85 | | 74-77 | |
| | mean | 72.2 | | | |
| Santa Fe CC | range | 64-74 | 63-66 | 64-69 | 63-70 |
| | mean | 66.3 | 64.6 | 66 | 66.5 |
| San Juan C | range | 61-84 | 66 | 67-68 | |
| | mean | 69.8 | 66 | 67.5 | |
| Northern NM CC | range | 64-89 | 64-71 | 61-75 | |
| | mean | 68 | 70 | 70 | |
| Clovis CC | range | 65-77 | 65-69 | 66-69 | |
| | mean | 69.7 | 67.7 | 67.5 | |
| NM Junior C | range | 64-70 | 64 | 64 | |
| | mean | 66.3 | 64 | 64 | |
| Albuq. T-VI | range | 61-86 | 65-72 | 64-71 | |
| | mean | 72.9 | 68.8 | 68 | |
| ENMU-Ruidoso | range | 69 | 67 | 64-69 | |
| | mean | 69 | 67 | 65.8 | |
| ENMU-Roswell | range | 64-72 | 67-74 | 64-70 | |
| | mean | 67.6 | 70.5 | 67.4 | |
| NMSU-Doña Ana | range | 66-82 | 72-76 | 66 | |
| | mean | 67.8 | 74 | 66 | |
| NMSU-Carlsbad | range | <---66-70---> | | | |
| NMSU-Grants | range | <---65-68---> | | | |
| NMSU-Alamogordo | range | <---66-72---> | | | |
| UNM-Gallup | range | 60-66 | 63-76 | 60-73 | |
| | mean | 62.1 | 71.2 | 64.9 | |
| UNM-Los Alamos | range | 63-67 | 65-67 | 63-66 | |
| | mean | 64.3 | 66 | 65 | |
| UNM-Valencia | range | 60-69 | 60-63 | 60-65 | |
| | mean | 65.5 | 61.7 | 62.3 | |
| | | | | | |
| **Total** | **range** | **60-89** | **60-76** | **60-77** | |
| | **mean** | **69.5** | **67.5** | **67.3** | |
| | **median** | **66** | **66** | **66** | |

Data from current institutional catalogs of NM associate degree-granting institutions

[1] Adelman, C. (October 1998) AAHE Bulletin

[2] For the first step, classifying students as transfers or non-transfers, the method followed was to identify (using the CHE's Degree File) all students, statewide, receiving a bachelor's or associate's degree from a New Mexico college or university during academic year 1997-98. The CHE's Student File, which describes each student enrolled during a given academic term, was then searched for all terms back to Fall 1985 (a fifteen year window comparable to last year's methodology) to identify the earliest point at which each student was designated as a first-time-freshman and/or as a transfer student at one of New Mexico's public campuses. This process is limited somewhat by the fact

that some campuses were not part of the CHE's data base until later in the 1980s, data for selected terms at selected campuses are missing for other reasons, and a very small number of 1997-98 graduates may have entered or transferred prior to 1985. Of the 8,709 graduates of 1997-98, 1,870 (21%) could not be classified as transfers or non-transfers. Because this part of the analysis is based upon the Student File, those students who originally enroll at the institution where they complete their degree continue to be classified as native students, even if they have taken some coursework elsewhere as part of their studies.

For the second step, counting credit hours, data are from the CHE's Student File which reports enrolled hours as of the 21st day of the semester ("census date"). Each student's attempted credit hours in every term for which he/she was enrolled were cumulated between the earliest date in the system through graduation. For students who had transferred into a New Mexico college or university from an out-of-state institution, this total does not include any credits attempted out of state, because those credits are not included in the CHE's data base. Therefore, the credit analysis cannot be meaningfully applied to transfers from out of state.

[3] Some 1997-98 degree recipients-both transfer and native-may have cumulative credit hour totals that include prior degrees. Also, by going back to 1985 to count cumulative credit hours, the picture of efficiency which emerges is clouded by institutional practices that both pre-date and follow statewide efforts beginning in the early 1990s to improve articulation and transfer.

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